MUTUAL FIRE BRIGADE

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it, because community is how we heal. Community is how we do everything.”

The fascistic forces of social domination will likely continue their scorched-earth ethos in the days ahead, attempting to break us and making us feel as if we’re in the end times. All the more reason that we must care for each other, and in ways that gesture toward a future—even as we aspire to collectively, tangibly, and yes, even tenderly make the present far more livable for as many of us as we can.

As our vulnerable planet burns, let’s be our own volunteer fire brigade!

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In mid-November 2018, smoke from the hellfires of so-called California drifted to my home base, so-called Michigan, as humans and nonhumans on the West Coast struggled to breath, struggled not to die from the latest “historic” new normal of capital/state-fueled climate catastrophe. Too many of us these days are feeling despair, perplexed as to how to stop the runaway conflagration that’s barreling toward us—or has already burned us. All bets are off on whether those flames can be calmed, much less extinguished.

The current social order is the disaster, and on a daily basis. Grist.org, for instance, turned the massive *Fourth National Climate Assessment* into an easy-to-read guide of how global temperature shifts will impact ten regions of Turtle Island. It’s

not a pretty weather forecast. As Grist.org notes, we're already increasingly in the storm. Yet Grist.org emphasizes that "we need to know what's happening in our respective spaces so we can be prepared."

"Prepared" can mean many things, of course. For the world's richest people, it means buying up those regions predicted to be the least destroyed —or last destroyed—by the ravages of an uneco-logical society of their own manufacturing, and then building fabulously luxurious gated communities for what might be the last of humans. As backup, they're investing in space travel to other planets. For some liberals and Far Right folks, whether as "prepper" or "survivalist," it involves learning individual survival skills and stocking up on emergency supplies in hopes of shielding their own ilk.

For the vast majority of humanity, however, any sort of preparation seems nigh impossible. Whether because of poverty or marginalization, white supremacy or settler colonialism, or other systemic violences, most people are stuck in the

nearby Chico set up tents in a Walmart parking lot, dubbed "Camp Wallywood." Quickly, some of the recent workshop participants called a face-to-face assembly in Chico, and upward of a hundred people showed up. Together they determined what was needed, and discussed the resources and talents on hand. They initially formed into working groups (later connected via a spokes council) to leap into autonomous direct action, and an informal organization took shape—North Valley Mutual Aid (NVMA).

Such makeshift projects are works in progress, growing in fits and starts. And the wounds of this specific disaster won't be mended easily or even soon, nor ever forgotten. Yet among other things, such as collecting and distributing material aid in do-it-ourselves ways, when folks in the Camp Wallywood asked for a community space, the NVMA engaged in the mutual and emotional aid of construction. As one evacuee in Camp Wallywood explained in an NVMA video, "When (NVMA) came out and built this community space, I know they get

tour did a preparedness workshop in so-called Chico. Premised on an ethics of "solidarity not charity," the workshops have come to numerous cities and rural areas across Turtle Island this past year. The notion of mutual aid disaster relief emerged out of radical collective self-care in the wake of previous calamities, such as the Common Ground Clinic set up right after Hurricane Katrina in so-called New Orleans or, closer to the present, the West Street Recovery in reply to Hurricane Harvey striking so-called Houston. MADR aims in part to inspire the building of everyday anarchistic and feministic infrastructure to handle the everyday disaster that is today's world while encouraging a loose nonhierarchical network—a small step toward knitting together a commons of care.

When the flames engulfed miles and miles of stolen land across the West Coast, the town of so-called Paradise became an inferno and then, in the blink of an eye, a wasteland, displacing over fifty thousand people. Some of those who fled to

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path of one socially constructed disaster after another. How is any sort of preparation possible in this zombie apocalypse, in which it feels as if we're reduced to a choice between fascism or extinction, or some macabre "survival of the fittest" without worry for others? How can we speak of "seeds beneath the snow"—possibilities in the present-day dystopia, or a prefigurative politics aspiring toward "everything for everyone"—when the polar ice caps are quickly melting?

The disaster that is capitalism, to name a big one, creates its own cracks, though. The question isn't how to become ambulance chasers in relation to suffering, or how to accelerate social collapse. Rather, it concerns our desire and growing capacity to self-determine and self-organize within those fissures. Or rephrased, it's a question of our desire and capacity to point toward a different fork in the road: fascism, extinction, or as a fellow troublemaker put it, "successful anarchism."

If the "real world" serves up horrific versions of

devastation and death, our actually existing efforts must supply liberatory forms of co-creation and life, and in as much abundance as we can. We actually already are! But too often, we busily bury our own seeds, thinking of what we do—from popular education and solidarity projects, to self-organized social/cultural spaces and self-governing assemblies, to building collective infrastructure and carving out autonomous communities—as the "unreal world." For sure, our experiments do feel *otherworldly*. They should! Yet in a manner that allows us and, just as crucially, people who aren't in our rebellious subcultures to exclaim, "I've never felt so alive!" Our work should be that of cultivators: loosening the soil around cracks that are already there, tending to and nurturing those spaces of possibility, and fostering the growth of good lives and good deaths, all with intentionality, fed with waters of empathy, dignity, and love.

Cultivation isn't a onetime or occasional practice. It's the stuff of daily life, or what could be

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called radical collective self-care. The "self-" here is inherently part of an ecosystem, a social "collective," made up of qualitatively diverse parts that thrive on interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocity. Such care is also "radical" in the sense of getting to the roots—both those of structural violence and what we must encourage to blossom. In this way, we might fiercely uproot pernicious systems that are antithetical to shared freedoms. We might—and in many subterranean ways, we already are—just as fiercely prepare the ground for healthy, mutualistically caring lifeways in their stead.

Because only we can and must take care of each other. That means ramping up not only our own everyday care toward others. Equally essential, it means crafting an infrastructure of radical collective self-care that's solid and continuous—as simultaneous resistance to and replacement for this fucked-up social system.

About a week before the fires swept through California, the Mutual Aid Disaster Relief (MADR)